



## In This Issue

- Heart to Heart with Hardisty
- Employee Spotlight—Mike Hughes
- Hoosier Happenings
- Women's History Month
- Partners' Web Links
- Personnel Updates
- Featured Website
- Mark Your Calendar

## Heart to Heart ... with Hardisty



We have received our budget allocation for fiscal year 2007. While our financial assistance dollars are about the same, our technical assistance for each program and the Conservation Technical Assistance Program funds are less than last year. Due to the way we have been managing our operations and budget, and because of several retirements, we will be able to move forward to fill some critical positions in the state.

Thanks to all of you for making our delivery structure work for us, so that we can continue to operate efficiently and effectively within our allocation. I am so proud of all the Indiana NRCS employees and the work you do.



Indiana NRCS has officially moved from the East Region to the Central Region. Along with this change, we have a new Regional Assistant Chief, Christina Muedeking. A native of Minnesota, Christina grew up on a family farm where she learned about conservation first hand. I welcome Christina to the Agency and look forward to working with her.



NRCS has completed the Human Capital Strategic Plan, and we have requested one for each Indiana NRCS employee. This piece is a companion to the agency's Strategic Plan, "Productive Lands—Healthy Environment," and will guide us as we recruit new employees, retain our experienced employees, and maintain our high standing as an employer of choice.

**\* \* \* \* Employee Spotlight \* \* \* \***  
**Mike Hughes**

Meet District Conservationist and IFEC Chair, Mike Hughes.

**Q:** Mike, how long have you worked for the agency?

**A:** For two summers I served as a WAE and SCEP participant, which helped get my foot in the door with the agency. After graduating from Purdue in 1999, I entered the real world and began a full time job as a soil conservationist in the far northern reaches of Indiana, working in Kosciusko and Starke counties. I moved on as a district conservationist in the Anderson Field Office in 2003, began an acting stint in Delaware and Blackford counties in 2004, and finally landed the DC position for these two counties in 2005.

**Q:** Will you tell us about your family's history with NRCS (SCS)?

**A:** I am actually very proud of my family's history of working for SCS. My grandfather, Bill Ponsler, was a soil conservation technician (SCT) for the agency from 1976-1990, and my uncle, Jason Ponsler worked as an SCT in the early 1980's. I hold fond memories of Granddad and I riding around in the country, looking at structures and projects that he had helped design and implement. I was in high school at the time, and it was always fascinating to hear him explain the structure or practice, and then hear about what the weather was doing during the time that the project was actually being installed. My grandfather Ponsler was a significant factor in me becoming an NRCS employee.

**Q:** We congratulate you as the new Chair of the Indiana Field Employee Council. What are some benefits that you have seen since the creation of this Council?

**A:** Thanks. I just finished my first meeting as chair, and it was a great experience. The benefits are vast and numerous, but there are two very significant benefits that I feel are the most important. For one thing, the IFEC committee provides a direct link between the

field and the leadership team via Jane, who by the way is a great listener and wonderful provider of excellent advice. Issues from the field are brought to these meetings with very special consideration being given to confidentiality.

**Q:** I understand you have some musical abilities. Care to share?

**A:** I do attempt to play the guitar at certain intervals in my life. As of right now, I have 4 guitars and all 4 are hanging on the wall collecting dust. I am no Eric Clapton or Brad Paisley, but I do enjoy playing guitar from time to time, usually when it is cold outside and snow is on the ground. When I am practicing, I feel like I am okay at it, and when I am not, it just takes me a day or two to get back into the

swing of things. Guitar playing is sort of like riding a bike. It takes a bit to learn any kind of instrument, but when you get it figured out, it's pretty easy to re-learn.

**Q:** What else do you like to do in your spare time?

**A:** As of press time, I have completed 25+ miles of the 58 mile long Knobstone Trail. So, needless to say, I have been spending some of my spare time in southern Indiana. I also enjoy jogging, biking, walking, and listening to the radio. Now that it is getting warmer, I will probably do a little camping, as well.

**Q:** Any parting words of wisdom for our readers?

**A:** I feel very lucky to work for an agency that has a plethora of well-seasoned veterans. I am getting a little nervous in realizing that a lot of these folks are going to be retiring within the next five years or so. I have used their experience to build upon my own knowledge base, and it seems like I have a never ending bank of experience to call upon. I would encourage all new employees to learn as much as they can from these folks before it is too late. The first eight years of my career have flown by, and I'm learning that life itself will gain speed as I get older. With that, I would encourage everyone to try to enjoy life, eat healthy, exercise daily, and at least breathe every once in a while! Last, if you are having a bad day, head to the field—it's a great cure for all sorts of problems.



## Hoosier Happenings

### Master Farmer Praises EQIP

The Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District honored William R. Van Cleave this winter as the 2006 Master Farmer of the Year for putting conservation on the land. His first project with NRCS (then SCS), was to design and install a waterway in 1970. Today Van Cleave utilizes various conservation practices including 100% no-till, terracing, rock chutes and a waste holding pond. He applauds EQIP as “one of the best conservation programs the Federal government has offered.” He adds, “EQIP offers a wider range of what can be done, especially for livestock owners and operators.”

### Thoughts for Farmers

“As a farmer, are you ready for the future?” That was the title of an article that District Conservationist Tom Held wrote for the Knox County SWCD Annual Meeting about the many economic and conservation challenges facing farmers. Contact Tom for a copy of this thought provoking article.

### EQIP Participant in the News

A Wayne County EQIP participant, Tim McConaha, made the news in Indiana Prairie Farmer’s March issue. Tim enrolled in EQIP last year, agreeing to a five-year plan to improve resources related to cattle and timber production. Grazing Specialist Robert Zupancic provided assistance with the planning process, which includes installing water tanks, fencing cattle out of streams, and adding stone over a geotextile fabric base to protect heavy use areas.

### District Honors NRCS Employees

The new southeast area conservationist, Teresah Caire, spoke to a crowd of partners and peers at the Dearborn County SWCD Annual Meeting in March. As special guest speaker, Teresah captivated her audience as she shared her experience of owning a dairy farm in Mississippi during hurricane Katrina.

Two additional NRCS employees were honored at the annual meeting. District Conservationist Ken Lane and State Agronomist Barry Fisher were among the conservation partners who received awards for their work with the District in the field, at field days, and educational events.

### Partnership Hosts Grazing Conference

Attendance at the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference has grown annually and reached nearly 600 this year. The conference drew 500 Amish attendees who enjoyed two farmer panels along with training sessions and the trade show. “This conference has evolved into an excellent example of a partnership,” said Kimberly Neumann, area conservationist. “A volunteer steering committee does the majority of the planning, the SWCD takes the lead for registration, and NRCS plays a support role.” The ‘icing on the cake’ was the homemade lunch the Amish women prepared, along with their cinnamon rolls and cookies for breaks!

### ETVs Provide Valuable Assistance

Ken Lane, district conservationist in Switzerland County, is thankful to have Dale Sides (picture below) at his side. Dale donates at least 20 hours a month as an Earth Team Volunteer (ETV) helping Ken measure heavy use area protections, fencing, and other practices installed under EQIP.



Another Earth Team Volunteer, Dan McCain, continues to do a fantastic job in the northwest area. Dan logged in 272 hours for the first half of fiscal year 2007. Dan is currently working on Project W.E.E.D. (Wabash & Erie Earth Day) scheduled for April 21, and Delphi’s Historic Trails and Canal Park clean up and beautification work day on May 19th.

(Continued on page 4)

**—Special Emphasis—**

**March—Women's History Month**

During March, the history of American women will be recognized and celebrated throughout the country. The theme of this year's Women's History Month, "Generations of Women Moving History Forward," celebrates the wisdom and tenacity of prior and future generations of women. It also recognizes the power and impact of generations of women working together.

This year the National Women's History Project honors 14 women whose lives and work span over 150 years and eight generations, as well as a wide range of occupations and accomplishments. Each one, with skillful and courageous actions, has helped move history forward. Go to [http://www.nwhp.org/whm/gage\\_bio.php](http://www.nwhp.org/whm/gage_bio.php) for full biographies of these women.

Indiana's current NRCS Federal Women's Special Emphasis Program Manager is Rita Schaus. You can contact Rita via email at [rita.schaus@in.usda.gov](mailto:rita.schaus@in.usda.gov) with questions or comments regarding the Federal Women's Program. For more information, go to Indiana's Federal Women's Program website at [http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/about/Civil\\_Rights/Federal\\_Womens\\_Program/fwp\\_cr\\_page.html](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/about/Civil_Rights/Federal_Womens_Program/fwp_cr_page.html)

**Hoosier Happenings (cont.)**

**FAN Receives Grant**

The Farmers Alliance Network (FAN) recently received a grant from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA). OCRA Project Manager Heather Powell praised those involved with FAN for their "innovation, dedication, and hard work in rural communities." This grant enables FAN, a project supported by the Hoosier Heartland RC&D Council and central Indiana SWCDs, to continue to assist farmers in 10 central Indiana counties.

**Time to Submit RFF Award Applications**

Don't let time run out to submit an application for the River Friendly Farmer award. The application form and brochure are available at [www.iaswcd.org](http://www.iaswcd.org) under Programs. Check with the local SWCD for their deadline. Districts will submit their applications to IASWCD by June 27, 2007. The awards will be presented at the Indiana State Fair on Farmers' Day.

**Congrats to RC&D!**

Wolcottville resident Charles Knight recently signed a permanent agreement with the Wood-Land-Lakes RC&D to protect his 23 acres of woodland from future development. The RC&D now protects nearly 1,000 acres of land in their area. Congratulations!

**Lights, Camera, Action...**

Soil Scientist Shane McBurnett is appearing on a series of PBS shows, "Outdoor Elements," where he discusses glacial geology, rock movement in Indiana, and other soil related issues. With his 'flair' for educating and entertaining, he is a natural. Contact Shane to see a copy of his first film!

**Agri-Tourism CD in the Mail**

Watch the mail for the Agri-Tourism CD, produced by the Indiana League of RC&Ds and Purdue Extension. Contact Kitty Perkinson at [catrina.perkinson@in.usda.gov](mailto:catrina.perkinson@in.usda.gov) for more copies.

**PARTNERSHIP LINKS**

Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, *Weekly Updates*:  
<http://www.iaswcd.org/WeeklyUpdatesJan07.htm>

ISDA, Division of Soil Conservation  
<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/>

Purdue University - [www.purdue.edu](http://www.purdue.edu)

Indiana Conservation Partnership Strategic Plan Information  
<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/icp/index.html>



## **PERSONNEL UPDATES**

### Retirements:

Duane Drockelman, Resource Management Specialist, 03-31-07

### Relocations:

Washington Technical Team—moved to Princeton as the Princeton Technical Team

Greensburg Technical Team—ALL members now located in Greensburg

Tom Varns, relocated from Bloomington to Greencastle Technical Team office

## **Featured Website—2006 Crop Residue Management Survey**

**<http://www.conservationinformation.org/?action=crm>**

More than 300 counties in 21 states, including Indiana, participated in the first voluntary tillage data collection to reduce the 2006 Crop Residue Management Survey released by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC). The results indicate conservation tillage acres continue to grow across the country. The survey was the result of partnership efforts of NRCS, SWCDs, Purdue Extension, and others at the local level who have interest in tracking trends of conservation tillage adoption. Go to the site above to download a free summary of the survey as a PDF.

## **Mark Your Calendar**

### April

04/15-21/07	National Volunteer Week, “Earth Team Volunteers—Caring is Always in Season”
04/21-29/07	National Wildlife Week, “Get out of the House and into Nature”
04/22/07	Earth Day
04/24/07	NW Area Meeting
04/25-26/07	New Beginnings...with 20 Years of Traditions (formerly Camp Gallahue Environmental Education Workshop), Waycross Camp & Conference Center, Brown County. Contact Hoosier Heartland RC&D at <a href="http://www.hhrd.org">www.hhrd.org</a> or 317-290-3250.
04/26/07	SW Area Meeting
04/29-05/06/07	NACD 2007 Stewardship Week, “Today is the Day to be Part of Conservation’s Power”. See <a href="http://stewardship.nacdnet.org/">http://stewardship.nacdnet.org/</a>

May

05/01/07	NE Area Meeting
05/02/07	SE Area Meeting
05/22/07	NW Area Meeting
05/23/07	SW Area Meeting
05/28/07	<b>Memorial Day Holiday</b>

June

06/05/07	NE Area Meeting
06/06/07	SE Area Meeting
06/26/07	NW Area Meeting
06/27/07	SW Area Meeting
06/28/07	Prime Farmland Reclamation Field Day, Bicknell, IN

July

07/04/07	<b>Independence Day Holiday</b>
07/10/07	NE Area Meeting
07/11/07	SE Area Meeting
07/19/07	State Soil Scientists' Meeting, Indianapolis
07/31/07	NW Area Meeting

August

08/01/07	SW Area Meeting
08/07/07	NE Area Meeting
08/08/07	SE Area Meeting
08/08-19/07	Indiana State Fair

Note: For a listing of Natural Resources Education Center workshops, go to [www.in.gov/dnr/nrec](http://www.in.gov/dnr/nrec)

*Helping People Help the Land*